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EDGEWATER PARK - Representatives from several riverfront towns met this week with officials from NJ Transit and the Federal Railroad Administration to discuss quieting the blaring train horns that are sounded each time a River Line train approaches a street crossing.

They learned that creating so-called "quiet zones" along the line is permitted, but that it will require cooperation among neighboring municipalities and, in all likelihood, substantial amounts of money for crossing-gate improvements.

"You have a very unique situation here," Brian Hontz, Region 1 coordinator for the Federal Railroad Administration, said Tuesday night during a meeting at the township municipal building, referring to the 20 municipalities and numerous road crossings along the 34-mile line.

Because a quiet zone must be at least a half-mile long, Hontz said cooperation would be needed among the affected communities.

Most of the street crossings within any proposed zone would need to be either closed or improved by the addition of four-quadrant gates that prevent a vehicle from weaving around the barriers that come down.

None of the crossings along the line has those gates, and Hontz estimated that it would cost at least \$60,000 per crossing to install them.

At that cost, federal funding would be crucial, according to the towns' representatives.

"Can't you just give us some money to quiet our towns?" Delanco Mayor Kate Fitzpatrick asked. "There has to be something the federal government can do to help us. For the people who live along (the line), it's a disaster."

In addition to Fitzpatrick, representatives from Beverly, Cinnaminson, Delran, Edgewater Park and Willingboro as well as state Sen. Diane Allen's office attended the meeting.

Hontz and other federal officials were sympathetic to residents' complaints but said the horn blasts were required under safety regulations. Nationwide, more than 700 people have been struck by trains this year, they noted.

"Our job is to regulate rail safety," administration inspector Lawrence Kuin said. "With all the people on cell phones and listening to MP3 players, the horns are needed and they're loud for that reason."

Hontz said federal funding is available for safety improvements, but that grants typically are used to improve unprotected crossings and not to create quiet zones.

NJ Transit representative Joe North volunteered the agency's services to devise possible "quiet zone scenarios" for towns to consider.

"One of the challenges we face is that we don't know how much money we need," said North, who is NJ Transit's director of light-rail operations.

U.S. Rep. John Adler, D-3rd of Cherry Hill, who organized the meeting, said his office would help schedule additional meetings so that towns can coordinate the planning needed to form quiet zones.

He said the issue clearly affects the quality of life along the line.

"It's a great line, but when the horn sounds it's troublesome," Adler said.

Linda Dougherty, Edgewater Park's township administrator, agreed that all the municipalities must be involved.

"If this is going to happen, we're going to need the participation of everybody," Dougherty said.